

Lester Guard Station
Forest Service Road No. 45
Lester
King County
Washington

HABS No. WA-172

HABS
WASH,
17-LEST,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

HABS
WASH
17-LEST,
1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

LESTER GUARD STATION HABS NO. WA-172

Location: Lester, Washington
Lots 15, 16 and the easterly 10 ft. of Lot 14 in
Block D, near Forest Service Road #45. Section 23,
Township 20N, Range 10E.

Present Owner: City of Tacoma

Present Occupant: Unoccupied

Present Use: Not currently in use

Significance: The Lester Guard Station is an intact example of a
transitional USDA Forest Service facility which possesses
strong historical associations with early Forest Service
administration and also reflects the depression-era
development of Forest Service policy and the accomplish-
ments of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical Context

The Lester Guard Station is located within the isolated and abandoned mountain town of Lester, Washington on the western slope of the Cascade Range. Situated deep within the Upper Green River (Tacoma) watershed, it is approximately 75 miles east of the City of Tacoma and 15 miles west of the Cascade Crest. The town of Lester developed along the north bank of the Green River within the original 400 ft. right-of-way of the Cascade Branch of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Approximately 27% of the 150,000 acre valley which surrounds Lester is within the Snoqualmie National Forest. The remaining acreage is principally held by Burlington Northern, Weyerhaeuser, the State of Washington and the City of Tacoma.

Historical Context of the Site

The town of Lester has important historical associations with the construction of the Cascade Branch of the Northern Pacific Railroad and the opening of the Puget Sound Region to direct eastern trade and immigration. The white settlement of the valley and the establishment of Lester began in 1886 with the construction of the Stampede Pass Tunnels, a spectacular and crucial link in the railroad system. The Lester Depot (1886) was built to serve as a helper station which housed passenger and freight functions and serviced the helper engines, steam plows and work trains. The town's economy and population grew steadily for several decades with the operation of the railroad and the expansion of logging operations in the valley. In conjunction with generally increased activity, and the specific operation of the steam railway, was the significantly increased danger of forest fires. Thus, in 1902 a series of railroad caused fires occurred which burned approximately 30,000 acres of forest lands.

Establishment of the National Forest Service

Concern for the protection of publicly held forest lands prompted the establishment of the first National Forest Reserves in the Pacific Northwest in 1892. By 1897, Federal legislation was enacted which founded the basis for Federal protection and management, primarily custodial, of the reserves by forest rangers. In 1905, when the USDA Forest Service was created, the Forest Reserves became known as National Forests. Rangers and supervisors then began to develop a comprehensive system for administering the forests which included the construction of trails, roads, lookouts and ranger stations. In 1908, the Forest Service's fire protection purposes were further strengthened when paid fire crews began to be formally recruited from the railroad, logging camps or brought in from Seattle or Tacoma to fight fires. This same year, Snoqualmie National Forest was established. In 1910, the Forest Service entered into a cooperative fire suppression agreement with the Northern Pacific Railroad.

LESTER GUARD STATION
HABS NO. WA- 172 (Page 3)

Thus, between 1910 and 1912 a Ranger Station, which consisted of a dwelling, barn and woodshed was developed on government land at Sunday Creek, approximately 4 miles east of Lester. The Sunday Creek Ranger Station proved to be too great a distance from Lester, where the majority of the ranger's work was apparently handled.

Establishment of the Lester Guard Station

USDA Forest Service files include a letter from the Forest Supervisor (June 13, 1914) to Northern Pacific which requested "rent of a small track at Lester" in order to place a tent for use by the firepatrolman. Further correspondence indicates the intention of erecting a building for storage of firefighting tools and to also be occupied occasionally by the patrolman. In September 1914, a 50 x 100 ft. lot was leased from the Railroad for the purpose of maintaining "a dwelling". Lewis A. Treen, Jr. (Acting Forest Supervisor) reported in February 1916 that a cabin was built in 1914 for the "purpose of furnishing headquarters and storage facilities". He further reported that maps and equipment were moved from the Sunday Creek Station and that a ranger and one guard lived in the cabin the entire summer of 1915.

The establishment and expansion of the station appears to closely follow national trends in administration and program objectives typical of the Forest Service during its formative years. Few primary source materials were found which document the initial use of, or alterations to, the original cabin during the following two decades. The chronology of alterations and additions to the cabin and the expansion of the station is evident through close field examination of intact historic building fabric within the context of Forest Service goals and policies.

The report prepared by L.A. Treen, Jr. (February 1916) stated that the "Lester Tool and Store House" was a one room frame house, 12 x 18 ft. with a shingle roof. This report further proposed the construction of a 12 x 18 ft. addition and the need for a larger dwelling to house three to four men and storage of all fire equipment. In 1923, shortly after the Forest Service had undergone further reorganization, a Speeder House (sold in 1950 and relocated elsewhere) was constructed. The Speeder House was required in order to provide more space for a structure referred to as the "Ranger Station House" (USDA Forest Service correspondence, September 18, 1923), later known as the Guard Station Residence and Office (Bldg. #1036). A confusing 1945 memo lists the "bunkhouse and office" as having been constructed 1921-23. Examination of concealed building fabric (i.e. exterior sheathing on interior walls) and finish materials (i.e. variations in flooring materials, window sizes and shapes and kneebrace construction) clearly indicates that the office area is the earliest of two additions made to the original cabin. The initial addition would have provided stair access to an upper floor and expanded the cabin to meet the needs stated in Treen's report. A scaled sketch map (dated December 13, 1932) drawn as the Forest Service prepared to expand the station also shows a structure in the exact location of the existing front portions of Bldg. #1036.

Expansion of the Lester Guard Station

The expansion of the Lester Guard Station to its present form was the result of reconstruction (remodeling), new construction and site development which occurred in 1933-34. The conscious development and expansion of the entire site to create an architecturally unified and functional station was part of a National trend which greatly expanded the responsibilities and program development of the Forest Service.

The 1932 sketch map, referred to above, was prepared as the Forest Service negotiated the lease of additional property to construct a storage building for road equipment. In addition to acquiring the adjacent 60 x 100 ft. lot area to the west, the Forest Service also purchased a frame building, the "Barclay building" (Forest Service Correspondence, December 27, 1932), located on the lot. Records documenting an original construction date have not been found but it is assumed that the Barclay building dates from c.1920, when the majority of buildings in Lester were constructed. The building, as described in the bill of sale and the 1932 sketch plan, is roughly the same configuration and size as the Bunkhouse/Crew Quarters (Bldg. #1331). It was a fairly wide spread practice within the Forest Service, and the general public, to acquire and move buildings. The remote location of the site, current economic conditions and the temporary nature of the Forest Service lease all serve to reinforce the basis for assuming Bldg. #1331, although apparently altered, is the relocated Barclay building. A lease agreement (dated May 30, 1933) refers to both a "Bunkhouse" and the "Office", thus it appears the building had been moved and was in use.

A small rectangular building was also noted on the 1932 sketch plan. Lease agreements from May and July 1933, and which clearly pre-date the recorded construction of the Warehouse (Bldg. #2232), refer both to a warehouse or storehouse building. It appears the Gas and Oil House (Bldg. #2532) functioned as a small storage building or warehouse for fuel required for road equipment and predates the construction of the historic Fire Warehouse (c.1934) built to house the road equipment. Motorized vehicles were first introduced in Lester c.1927 and fuel was initially hauled in barrels to Lester by train. The corrugated sheet metal exterior cladding appears to be original building fabric and is a fire resistive material appropriate for the building's function.

Although parts of the entire station appear to have been remodeled during the depression-era, the only structure which can be documented as having been constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) is the Warehouse (Bldg. #2232). Motorized vehicles were used on a very limited basis by the Forest Service until the late 1920's. Thus, Forest Service records from 1932 reveal the need for a storage building for road equipment and the acquisition of additional leased property for construction of a "Gas Car House" (Forest Service Correspondence, December 13, 1932).

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in March 1933, the United States was in the midst of the great financial depression. His administration began to immediately implement massive Federal intervention programs, including the CCC

LESTER GUARD STATION
HABS NO. WA- 172 (Page 5)

which was founded in April 1933. The CCC had a significant impact on the development and improvement of National Forests in the Pacific Northwest. In 1932, the Forest Service initiated an extensive ten-year National plan for forest projects and resource development which made a major shift of emphasis from earlier custodial responsibilities. The establishment of the CCC coincided with the implementation of this plan and Forest Service CCC camps were rapidly established. C.J. Conover reported (unpublished report dated July 30, 1942) that CCC Company #1745 occupied a camp at Lester between October 27, 1933 and October 16, 1934. He further reported: "56 miles of telephone line was built along the roads. Snags were felled on 30 miles of fire breaks around Lester, 24 bridges were built including one across Sunday Creek on the old N.P. Railway bridge piers. Three lookout houses were built, at Humphery, Meadow Mts. and Stampede. 14 other buildings were constructed, including the fire warehouse on the lot leased from the N.P. at Lester."

The Warehouse (Bldg. #2232) exhibits a group of building materials and architectural elements which are found throughout the Lester Guard Station and serve to unify the building group. The plan for the Warehouse is typical of an all purpose, combination guard station for the period. It was executed in a none obtrusive manner meant to harmonize with the vernacular style buildings already established at the station and typically found within the town. It appears that remodeling and some relocating of the existing buildings occurred in conjunction with the construction of the Warehouse. This work included; construction of rear addition (housing toilet and shower facilities) to the Guard Station Residence, possible roofline changes to the Bunkhouse/Crew Quarters, front porch and kneebrace additions and installation of beaded board interior finishes.

Use of the Lester Guard Station 1934-1985

Following a series of catastrophic fires which occurred in Oregon during the summer 1933, the Forest Service began an aggressive policy of hiring seasonal workforces to be trained and prepared in response to fire danger. Thus, a large crew consisting of up to thirty Forest Service employees was housed at the Station during fire seasons from the late 1930's until c.1950. The introduction of diesel locomotion and the decline of railroad logging reduced both the workforce and the population of the valley and the degree of fire danger. During the 1960's and early 1970's a small fire crew (again supplemented by the local population and using shared regional resources especially air resources) and an engineering crew occupied the Station during the fire season. In 1975 the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) began to assume responsibility for protecting all private lands within the watershed. The USDA Forest Service continued to protect the public lands and to provide daily fire weather observations. In 1982 a Remote Automatic Weather Station was installed and the DNR began to provide dispatch services for fires on all lands. Since 1981 the DNR has sub-leased the Lester Guard Station facilities on a temporary basis. Thus, after nearly, seventy years, the Forest Service ceased providing fire protection within the Upper Green River watershed.

Current Status

Concurrent with the establishment and use of the Lester Guard Station is the historical role of the City of Tacoma in the Upper Green River valley. In 1910, the City of Tacoma obtained authorization to construct a gravity water supply system within the watershed. In 1914, a cooperative agreement was made between the Mayor of Tacoma and the Secretary of Agriculture for the purpose of conserving and protecting the City's water supply. Thus, with the objective of discouraging the residential occupation of the valley, the City began a long-term policy of which the abandoned town of Lester is a current result. In 1963, the cooperative agreement was terminated and a considerable amount of road construction and logging occurred on privately held lands. Since then, the City has actively consolidated their lands by acquiring privately held properties. In 1967, the Lester Guard Station, located on property still leased from the railroad, was purchased by the City. The USDA Forest Service continued to lease the site from the City on an annual basis until September 1985. Since 1981 the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has subleased the Guard Station from the Forest Service and used the facilities on a seasonal basis. The City of Tacoma has agreed to allow the DNR to continue to lease the buildings although it is expected that the City will require the DNR to move to other facilities in the future. Although the property has been found eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the City of Tacoma is not willing to agree to protective covenants which would assure its preservation and maintenance. Additionally, the relocation of the Station was found to be impractical. It is presumed that the Station will be allowed to deteriorate and eventually be removed entirely. The Forest Service, in consultation with the Washington State Historic Preservation Officer, has determined that termination of the lease and transfer out of Federal ownership, will result in an Adverse Effect to this historic property. Hence, the USDA Forest Service has undertaken this project in order to record the buildings to the standards of the Historic American Building Survey (HABS).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General Statement

The Lester Guard Station includes the concealed and heavily altered original Ranger Station House (1914) and the relocated Barclay building (c.1920). The present form of the Station is the result of reconstruction (remodeling), new construction and site development which occurred in 1933-1934. This expansion was executed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during its earliest enrollment period. The architecture is primarily vernacular while exhibiting some elements of a rustic style. The character of the station is an outgrowth of influences which predate the depression-era reconstruction and site development. The station possesses strong associations with the initial physical development of Forest Service administration when the use of a domestic vernacular building style and the acquisition and relocation of local buildings was a wide spread practice. In an effort to establish an agency identity, Forest Service facilities constructed during the CCC era included consciously designed rustic elements based on rural vernacular models. The rustic elements (steeply pitched gable roofs, kneebraces, wooden siding and trim, multiple-light window sash) found at the Lester Guard Station are primarily a reflection of local building tradition and the local availability of economical and native building materials. The expansion and conscious development of the entire station site in an architecturally unified and functional manner is a reflection of depression-era Forest Service policy, program administration and expanded responsibilities.

The Lester Guard Station has been occupied, used and maintained on a seasonal basis since its initial establishment. The Guard Station Residence and Office (Bldg.#1036) and the Bunkhouse/Crew Quarters (Bldg.#1331) are in good condition. The Gas and Oil House (Bldg.#2532) is in fair condition and the Warehouse (Bldg.#2232) is in fair to poor condition.

Exterior Description

Sketch plans and individual Architectural Data Forms for each of the four buildings follow the body of this report. Foundations are all poured concrete perimeter with the exception of the Gas and Oil House which is slab on grade. Structural systems for each building are conventional wood frame. Walls are clad with dropped wooden siding and corner boards with the exception of the Gas and Oil House clad with corrugated sheet metal. Small gabled-roof open porches are located on the front elevations of the residential buildings. Windows are wooden sash and primarily six-light, hopper type with plain surrounds, although the Guard Station Residence exhibits a wide variety of window types and sizes which reveal the chronology of alterations made to the original cabin. Exterior doors in place at the majority of openings are wooden five-panel rail and stile type or three-panel with upper light. The Warehouse exhibits distinctive custom sliding doors (10' x 10') incorporating beaded board (3/4" x 3-1/4" T&G) and X-bracing with rail and stile construction. Roofs are all

steeply pitched (12:12) gable type and generally covered by a layer of cedar shakes over cedar shingles with the exception of the Warehouse with only the shingle layer and the Oil and Gas House covered by corrugated sheet metal. Exposed rafter ends and built-up kneebraces located at the porches and gable ends are distinctive exterior features. Gable-end kneebraces at the Guard Station Residence vary slightly from those on the Bunkhouse and Warehouse and further reveal the building fabric chronology of the Station. At least two layers of paint have been applied to the exterior siding and trim of each building.

Interior Description

Sketch plans and individual Architectural Data Forms for each of the four buildings follow the body of this report. The buildings generally exhibit utilitarian interior features. Stairways are simply constructed with handrails built from dimensional lumber. Flooring is fir of varied widths in the residential buildings and concrete slab in the service buildings. Flooring variations exhibited in the upper floor of the Guard Station Residence, clearly indicate the chronology of alterations made to the original cabin. Walls and ceiling are typically covered with beaded board (3/4" x 3-1/4" T&G) throughout the residential buildings. The interiors of the service buildings are unfinished. The upper floor area of the Warehouse exhibits a distinctive series of exposed wooden trusses. Doors are five-panel rail and stile type. Heating was originally provided by wood stoves. One chimney and flue locations remain although electric baseboard units have been installed in the residential buildings. Plumbing facilities are limited to a small toilet room and large shower room in the Guard Station Residence and kitchen sinks in both residential buildings. Paint has been applied to interior finishes.

Site Description

A site sketch plan is included with the sketch plans which follow the body of this report. The Lester Guard Station site is situated approximately 1000 feet north of the Green River, between the river and the Burlington Northern Railroad tracks. The four buildings are tightly sited on a 100 ft. by 110 ft. formerly leased area. The site is flat with abandoned and deteriorated houses located on the property to the east and west. Surrounding the Station to the south and separating it visually from the river is a dense grove of deciduous trees. The four buildings are situated at the perimeter of the site in order to maximize space for equipment operation and circulation in a central open service area. A small landscaped area is located at the Station entrance on the north edge of the site, adjacent to an access road parallel to the railroad tracks. This landscaped area includes the remnants of the station sign. Located on the site are clothesline poles, a weather station instrument box and a gasoline pump covered by a small shelter which post-date this historic period. Peeled logs define the open service area and wooden fences and posts border the east and west property lines.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Bibliography

Conover, C.J., "Lester CCC Camp, F-23", July 30, 1942. Unpublished manuscript on file at USDA Forest Service, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Seattle, WA.

Kapral, Rand, "The Upper Green River and the Lester Guard Station", 1984. Unpublished manuscript on file, USDA Forest Service, North Bend Ranger District, North Bend, WA.

Lentz, Florence K., "Lester Depot", National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, April, 1984.

Throop, E. Gail, "USDA Forest Service Administration Buildings in the State of Oregon and Washington built by the Civilian Conservation Corps", National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, September, 1984.

Treen, Lewis A., Jr., "Improvement Report, Snoqualmie National Forest, Part II Proposed Improvements", February 18, 1916. Unpublished report on file at USDA Forest Service, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Seattle, WA.

Treen, Lewis A., Jr., "Snoqualmie Improvement Report, Part I. Existing Improvements", February 18, 1916. Unpublished reports on file at USDA Forest Service, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Seattle, WA.

Williams, Dr. Gerald W., "The Civilian Conservation Corps' (CCC) Contribution to the Forests in the Pacific Northwest Region", USDA Forest Service, Umpqua National Forest, Roseburg, Oregon.

Williams, Dr. Gerald W., "The USDA Forest Service in the Pacific Northwest: Major Political Controversies and Societal Problems between 1981-1945," March 19, 1985. Umpqua National Forest, Roseburg, Oregon.

Property records, Lease Agreements, general USFS Correspondence. Unpublished documents in files of USDA Forest Service, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Seattle, WA.

Interviews

Dennis R. Ellison (City of Tacoma, Department of Public Utilities), November 1985.

Jack Ferrell (retired USDA Forest Service Radio Communication Officer), North Bend, WA., November 1985.

Frank Kauzlarick (retired USDA Forest Service, Lester Guard Station Engineer),
Issaquah, WA., November 1985.

E. Gail Throop (Regional Historian, USDA Forest Service), Portland, Oregon,
October 1985.

Prepared by: Katheryn H. Krafft
Architectural Researcher
November 1985

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

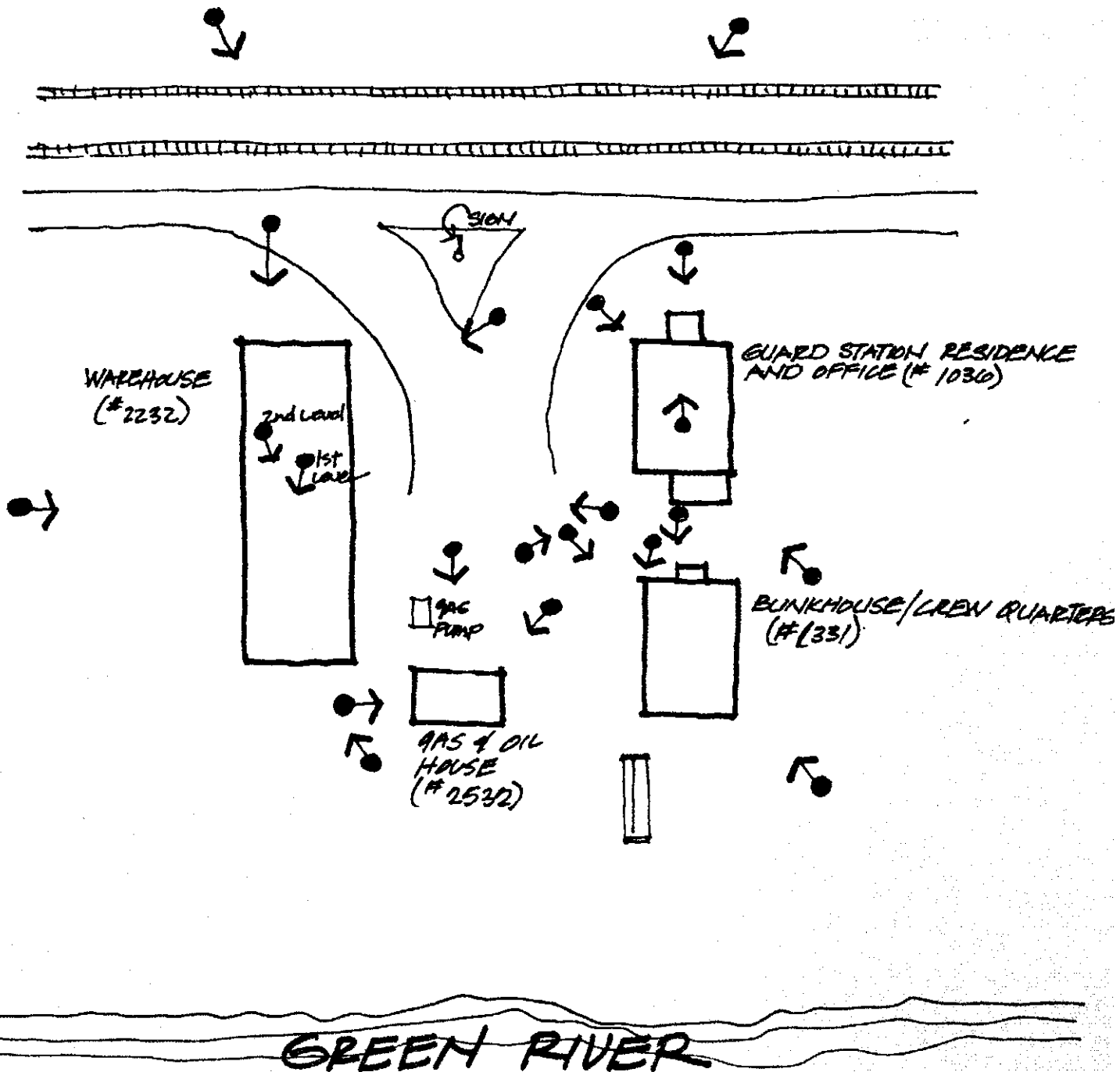
These records, in the form of a historical report and large format photographs, were prepared in October-November 1985 by Katheryn H. Krafft (Architectural Researcher) and Gregory A. Minaker (Architectural Photographer). This documentation was prepared for the Forest service, in compliance with Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and United States Code of Federal Requirement (16 U.S.C. 470f), in order to mitigate potential removal and/or deterioration of this historic property. Direction and guidance from the USDA Forest Service was provided by Madonna L. Moss, Forest Archaeologist, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

LESTER GUARD STATION CAMERA LOCATION & VIEW DIRECTION MAP NOT TO SCALE

KING COUNTY



LESTER, WASHINGTON



SITE PLAN **LESTER GUARD STATION** **KING COUNTY** **LESTER, WASHINGTON**

HABS No. WA-172 (page 13)

